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[Stanard, Mary Newton]

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for the preservation of Virginia
antiquities.

[Richmond, n.d.]



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JAMESTOWN
AND THE
Association for the Preservation of
Virginia Antiquities.



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JAMESTOWN AND THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE PRESERVATION OF VIRGINIA ANTIQUITIES.

Jamestown, the cradle of the American Republic, needs no advocate to set forth its claims to consideration. It makes its own plea in the fact that there was gained the first footing of our race upon the western shores of the Atlantic; there was the first Anglo-Saxon home, the first church—with its full God's acre—there was held the first legislative assembly in the new world.

Eventful as was the life of the little town, it was but brief. After the removal (about the year 1700) of the seat of government of Virginia to Williamsburg, nine miles distant, the superior attractiveness and healthfulness of the new capital drew the population thitherwards until Jamestown was almost entirely abandoned. Finally, the only residents left were two planters who turned the town into farms, with the ruined church tower, surrounded by broken gravestones, standing alone and neglected among the green fields.

Yet, in spite of this fact, and of its remoteness and inaccessibility, interest in a spot where so much history was made has always been strong enough to bring travellers to Virginia to visit it, and many and varied have been the reflections inspired by the solitary and venerable ruin. In even the earliest of these no mention is made of anything more than the tower and a few crumbling walls, scattered about. In many of them the washing away of the island is remarked upon, and belief expressed that almost all of the site of the ancient town had been already swallowed up by the river, which eats into the shore with an unremitting and powerful insistence.

About 1854 a trench was dug near the tower and the dimensions of the foundations of the church ascertained, but it was soon filled up. Year after year it was the custom of relic-hunters to carry away bricks from the tower and pieces of the tombs, and year after year the river was making further inroads, but all of this time, though Jamestown was mentioned in thousands of books, and its name as the birth place of the United States was universally known, no attempt was made to rescue its remains from destruction, and not even a suggestion that anything should be done to preserve its site was offered.

This great work was reserved for the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities.

This Association was chartered in February, 1889, with Mrs. Fitzhugh Lee as president, a number of other prominent Virginia women as incorporators and officers, and an advisory board of distinguished men.

At the resignation of Mrs. Lee, at the end of the first year, Mrs. Joseph Bryan was chosen to succeed her, and has held the office of president ever since. To her wise and faithful administration the success of the Association is largely due. While Richmond was made the home of the organization, branches were formed in various cities of Virginia and of the United States. Its object, as declared in its charter, is to "restore and preserve the ancient historic buildings and tombs in the State of Virginia and to acquire by purchase or gift the sites of such buildings and tombs with a view to their perpetuation and preservation." Its revenues have been from the beginning small—depending entirely upon dues of members and what money could be made by occasional entertainments. There have been so many calls for help that it has oftentimes been difficult to know what was the wisest disposition to make of the inadequate funds, yet during the fifteen years of its life the Association has been able to accomplish a creditable beginning towards the end for which it was formed. Its most noteworthy achievements, outside of the work connected with Jamestown, have been the purchase, restoration and preservation of the home of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg; of the old magazine, known as the "Powder Horn," in Williamsburg; the excavation and preservation of the foundations of the Colonial Capitol building, at Williamsburg; erection (by the Washington branch) of a memorial on the site of the Colonial Capitol; the placing of a tablet on the old lighthouse at Cape Henry memorializing the first landing of the first colonists (which was at this point); aid in restoring colonial churches, and numerous minor matters.

While the object of the Association is a general one, Jamestown has always been its chief interest, and the work dearest to its heart that entrusted to the Jamestown Committee, of which Mrs. Parke C. Bagby has been from the beginning the able and devoted chairman. Very early in its history the Association turned its attention towards securing possession of the church tower and the ground around it. In 1889 the first active steps toward this end were taken, largely through the instrumentality of the Norfolk branch, of which Miss Mary J. Galt was directress. As it was thought that the church and graveyard had, on account of extinction of the congregation, escheated to the State, an act of assembly was procured (approved March 1, 1892), by which all rights of the Commonwealth there were conveyed to the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities. Fortunately no further action was necessary; Jamestown island had become the property of Mr. Edward E. Barney, a gentleman capable of appreciating its historic associations, who had already turned his attention to the prevention of vandalism among the few relics that remained there. Moved by a broad and generous spirit of patriotism, Mr. and Mrs. Barney, on learning the purposes and wishes of the Association, conveyed to it, by deed of gift, dated May 3, 1893, the twenty-two and a half acres of land including the



PORTIONS OF FOUNDATIONS EXCAVATED
AT JAMESTOWN, 1903.

tower, churchyard and Confederate fort. Joyfully accepting this gracious gift, the Association immediately took charge and had soon built a fence around the property and established a caretaker upon it, who was afterwards, by act of Legislature, invested with the powers of a constable.

The next absolute and immediate need was at once seen to be protection from encroachment of the river. Chiefly through the efforts of Mrs. J. L. M. Curry, of Washington, D. C., an appropriation for building a breakwater was obtained from Congress, by act approved August 17, 1894. Unfortunately the appropriation was insufficient and the breakwater provided by it (which was completed on June 5, 1895), was soon beaten to pieces by the waves.

Discouraged, but not disheartened, the ladies of the Association again appealed to Congress and another appropriation was secured, by act approved June 3, 1896. For various reasons work on the new breakwater was not commenced for several years, but at last it was completed as far as the amount appropriated would admit, on November 16, 1901. It is a splendid example of engineering skill, protecting fully the part of the shore along which it extends, and giving promise that it will do so for a long time to come. The United States government never did a better piece of work than this. The breakwater was designed by Mr. Samuel H. Yonge, United States engineer in charge of James river improvements, and constructed under his supervision. Unfortunately, the appropriation only permitted the construction of such a substantial sea-wall for about half the exposed distance, beginning at the head of the island, and since 1901 the unprotected shore below it has been washing badly. It is the intention of the Association to use every effort to urge upon Congress during the present session, the completion of a work so well begun, and in this everybody in the country interested in the preservation of this most historic spot can lend aid.

In view of the fact that a large number of men and horses would be at work upon its property, the Association deemed it useless to attempt much in the way of beautifying its grounds until the breakwater should be finished, but roads were laid out, trees and flowers planted, the tower made secure against further damage from age or weather, and some little progress made in restoring tombs. The credit for the immediate superintendence of this part of the work during a number of years is due chiefly to Miss Mary Galt, of Williamsburg, who was succeeded in her watchfulness of the interests of the Association by Miss Mary Garrett, of the same place.

The most important undertaking of the Association, at Jamestown, was begun in 1901. In May of that year, Mr. John Tyler, Jr. (a civil engineer, who most kindly gave his services), upon the invitation of the Jamestown Committee, and with the assistance of the local committee, Misses Galt and Garrett, began excavations in the churchyard—a small

level grass-plot with a few old tombstones and knarled and half-decayed trees scattered about—the whole enclosed by a crumbling brick wall. Some of the trees were uprooted, the turf was removed, and three feet underground were discovered the foundations of the church—with floor, aisles and chancel, in a wonderful state of preservation, considering that they had been buried and their dimensions forgotten so long that the wall around the little graveyard had been laid directly across the body of the building. Beyond these foundations, with three feet of grass-grown soil above them, also, the spade revealed seven low, box-shaped tombs, with the slabs bearing inscriptions unfortunately missing. Measurement of the foundations showed that the church had been fifty-five feet long, exclusive of the tower, and twenty-six wide, with walls three feet thick, aisles paved with brick, and chancel with tiles nine inches square. Later excavations in the chancel have revealed two floors beneath this upper one. Abundant evidences of fire were found in the debris beneath the level of the last floor of the church, and in a corner lay the sexton's tools, with bits of charred wood showing where the helves had been. They were burned out, doubtless, during Bacon's Rebellion in 1676, when Jamestown was destroyed by fire, at Bacon's command. It is evident that afterwards, when the church was rebuilt, the ruins were not entirely cleared out, but that a foot or two of rubbish was left and paved over to form the floor of the last church. Not far within the three-foot wall were found fragments of a thinner one, which, from its character, is believed to have been the substructure of a frame building—probably a relic of the earliest church built upon this spot.

It was found that a large number of bodies had been buried in the church, and two tombstones were unearthed near the chancel. One of these, as may be seen from the inscription, is that of an early minister of the parish; the other is very noteworthy, as it is the only tomb ever found in America with indications of inlaid brasses such as are seen upon ancient monuments in England. The brasses themselves have disappeared, but the channels in the stone into which they fitted are plainly visible. These show the figure of a knight with pointed helmet and a scroll from the mouth. Partly under the tomb lay a skeleton with spurs near the heels, and fragments of gold lace at the shoulders. This interesting tomb bears no inscription, but has been dubbed by the enthusiastic excavators "the knight's tomb." Careful investigation makes it most probable that the unknown knight was Sir George Yeardley, one of the earliest governors of Virginia, who died in 1627.

Where is the Longfellow who will immortalize this interesting find?

The remarkable and scholarly monograph on Jamestown by Mr. Samuel H. Yonge, which begins in the January number of the *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, and with which others who have studied the subject agree, shows that there is every reason to believe that a church stood on this exact spot as early as the year 1619, and that

therefore, here met the first legislative assembly ever convened in America.

In the churchyard the skill of Mr. William Leal, stonemason (the efficient care-taker at Jamestown), has restored, as far as possible, the broken tombs and protected even the smallest fragment from further vandalism.

The year 1903 brought great increase of interest to Jamestown. During the fall and early winter a large block of brick foundations of five or six connected buildings was discovered by Mr. Yonge, and afterwards excavated and secured from destruction under his supervision. These foundations are on the ridge above the Confederate fort and extend for a distance of two hundred and forty feet, from the river bank inward. They include cellars and the steps leading into them, brick floors, large fire-places, &c. Mr. Yonge's monograph gives a minute description of these ruins and proves beyond a doubt that the building furthest from the river was the State House in existence in 1676, in which Nathaniel Bacon contested with Sir William Berkeley, and which was afterwards burned by the Rebel and his forces.

It will be seen, then, that Jamestown is no longer only a name, but that now, through the labors of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, one may look upon the very spots where those first law-makers assembled, and where the stirring drama of Bacon's Rebellion was played.

Mr. Yonge has located and placed upon the valuable map of Jamestown which his minute study of the early records has enabled him to make, many other interesting sites in this "Pompeii of America," as a recent tourist enthusiastically named the ancient town, and has even fixed, with almost absolute certainty, the exact point where the first settlers landed. For details of all of these discoveries and reasons for belief in them reference must be had to the monograph quoted.

Each year interest in Jamestown and the work of the Association there has been stimulated by a largely attended pilgrimage to the sacred spot and a memorial celebration there, on the 13th of May, the anniversary of the first settlement. The earliest of them was held in 1807—long before our Association was dreamt of, and others were held irregularly after that, but since its foundation the Association has made a special feature of these celebrations, in which it has been effectually aided by William and Mary College.

Many will doubtless ask what are the further purposes of the Association in regard to Jamestown. First of all it is its intention, emphasized by a resolution unanimously adopted by its last general meeting, never to convey away its property there. Its one object is to preserve and beautify the historic site in a manner worthy of all it stands for, but present needs are so pressing and means so limited that but few definite

plans for future work have been formed. First of all the completion of the sea-wall is earnestly desired, and then that, as soon as practicable, all the ground owned by the Association be thoroughly examined and all foundations excavated and secured against decay. The beginning of a fund to erect a memorial to John Smith has already been raised, through the efforts of Mrs. Charles Washington Coleman, of Williamsburg, one of the incorporators of the Association and from the beginning one of its most active and devoted friends. Another hope of the Association is to have a portion of its land laid out as a formal garden, in the midst of which will stand a house of the style of architecture contemporary with the first settlement, and which will contain a museum, accommodations for visitors, &c. Above all it is the cherished desire, in regard to buildings, that there shall be erected over and entirely outside of the foundations of the old church, a structure as much like the original as possible as to its walls, but which instead of a floor will show the unearthed foundations, tombs, and pavement, and whose windows shall contain memorials in stained glass of the doughty pioneers who first set up the flag and the cross of our motherland in the newly-found world of the west.

This house, which will not be a church, but which will be a sacred place, will no doubt bear upon its walls a tablet with some such inscription as this:

To the glory
of
God, our help in ages past,
Our hope in years to come,
and
In grateful memory
Of the ancient planters in Virginia
and adventurers in England,
who
Through suffering and death,
Evil report and loss of fortune
Laid the foundations of our country.

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